

***Call with Upstate Growers and Officials at U.S. Labor Department Builds On Months of Progress***

Rochester, NY – Congresswoman Louise Slaughter (NY-28), Ranking Member of the House Rules Committee and long-time advocate for farmers, today connected local growers to top officials at the U.S. Department of Labor who have, at Slaughter's urging, been working to eliminate many of the cumbersome hurdles that have long kept farmers from having access to the seasonal workforce needed to harvest their crops.

At risk are Upstate New York's seasonal crops – apples, grapes, and food crops – that create thousands of jobs and contribute millions of dollars to the regional economy. Farmers from across Upstate and across the country have long said that the seasonal worker program that gives them access to the labor they need must be streamlined.

Slaughter championed their cause by hosting a summit with local growers and the Deputy Secretary of Labor in Washington this past July, finally opening the lines of communication between farmers and agency officials. Slaughter has been pressing the Labor Department to streamline their administration of the H-2A program, stating that the program suffers from excessive time delays, paperwork burdens, and confusion with both growers and administrators of the program. These bureaucratic hurdles put the economic vitality of Western New York farmers at risk. As the number one economic driver in Upstate New York, a thriving agriculture industry is essential for the Empire State, she argues.

"Today I was happy to make sure growers from across Upstate New York could hear directly from the federal officials working to remove the red tape from a process that has plagued the upstate agriculture industry for years. I'm so pleased that the Department of Labor is working with and listening to our local growers to improve access to the labor they need this harvest season," said Slaughter. "Farmers who deal with the H-2A application process know it to be cumbersome and complex, but I know that's beginning to change and I'm delighted for it. They already gamble with the weather, they shouldn't have to gamble with federal paperwork to obtain a legal workforce, and I'm doing everything I can to see that they don't."

"Farmers have struggled for years with the senseless red tape and uneven application of the H2A Program," said Dean Norton, President of New York Farm Bureau. "It's time that officials at

the Department of Labor recognize that they need to work with us to streamline the H2A process-because we either import labor or we import food, it's that simple. I thank Congresswoman Slaughter for her support in continuing to facilitate a productive dialogue with Federal officials and I look forward to working with her to address the inadequacies of the H2A process once and for all."

In September, the Department of Labor announced that [action is already being taken to enhance the administration of the program by making better use of the internet](#), establishing a web-based filing system, providing more guidance to growers before they file necessary paperwork, and making Department representatives available to growers early in the process to more quickly iron out any discrepancies.

In December, the Department of Labor [released an Employer Handbook for employers anticipating filing an H-2A application for next season](#).  
[The 16-page hand book, complete with information on filing job orders and H-2A applications, conducting recruitment for U.S. workers, completing the temporary labor certification process and other helpful resources, can be found here.](#)

In January, the Department of Labor announced in a letter to Slaughter that [they have awarded a contract to a firm that will begin the process of putting elements of the H-2A program online](#).

All of this comes in response to [a letter Slaughter wrote to U.S. Department of Labor Secretary Hilda Solis](#) and [a follow up summit she hosted in July](#) with Deputy Secretary Seth Harris, Members of Congress and several regional growers that allowed many of the concerns raised consistently by local growers to be addressed directly by the Labor Department.

Upstate growers are encouraged to communicate directly with the H-2A Ombudsman Office, which was created following Slaughter's meeting with the Labor Department, by using the following email address [H2A.Ombudsman@dol.gov](mailto:H2A.Ombudsman@dol.gov).